



Department for Education and
Child Development

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HAVE YOUR SAY

Every chance for every child

Nurture. Learn. Achieve.



Policy discussion
paper four



Building a better South Australia for every child

Every year more than 19,000 babies are born in South Australia. Each one of these children represents a chance for a better future here in our State.

And to achieve their full potential, all children need the very best start in life.

The question is: how do we achieve that goal? The answer is of profound importance for all of us – whether or not we have our own children – because building a strong, vibrant and healthy South Australia for the next generation benefits everyone.

The main purpose and biggest challenge of any government is to increase the health and wellbeing of its citizens. Vigorous, creative and confident children build a strong, resilient and productive community now and into the future.

We can all share in creating a better State. Parents, carers, health workers, non-government service providers, business and industry, academics, teachers – and children themselves – can all make a difference.

South Australia is already a good place for children and families to live, work and play. We have many community assets that contribute to a high quality of life for children and families.

There are, however, worrying trends – not all children have the best possible start in life; there are increasing levels of childhood obesity; many children and young people are increasingly limited in their access to the outdoor environment, to unstructured play and independent movement.

Social research tells us that education, employment, healthy living conditions and social support networks all have a very strong influence on families' ability to provide the best environment for their developing children. Families with access to these conditions and supports are much better equipped to provide stable and healthy environments for their children.

As a society, we must do better, and the place to start is the very early years of a child's life. We know from neurological research that the early years are crucial for setting a solid foundation for children's development and wellbeing.

Research strongly indicates that investment in the early years not only increases the potential of the individual child, but benefits society as a whole.

That is why investing in the early years of childhood, as well as a commitment to children and young people at all 'ages and stages' are major priorities for the State Government.



Grace Portolesi
Minister for Education
and Child Development

But governments alone don't make a difference. We need to work in partnership with children, families and communities, and all who provide services and influence children's lives. We also need to recognise the power of a parent's love and respect the vital role that good parenting plays in developing strong citizens. As a community, we need to support parents in raising a confident and successful next generation of South Australians.

Parents are often the first to admit that sometimes they need help. There are many professionals and volunteers who can make a positive difference in the lives of children. Nurses, teachers, childcare and allied health professionals, carers, foster parents, volunteers in our hospitals, schools, children's centres, community centres and local government services and elsewhere, all contribute to the wellbeing of children. Grandparents, other relatives and friends add enormous support to this essential role of support for children.

As parents, we know that health, education and wellbeing are not separate aspects of a child's life. Children also don't grow up in isolation from their social and family circumstances. If we are to better realise the benefits of healthier and happier children, we need to pay attention to all aspects of a child's life.

This is a responsibility for the whole community. We have taken the lead to bring together services for children and families under the umbrella of a single agency that puts child development first. New child development legislation will also strengthen the way we plan, connect and shape services and systems that work together to support children.

This will build upon our proud history of support for children, especially those who are most vulnerable. To give every chance for every child, we need to address both the challenges and opportunities.

We want to hear your thoughts and ideas. By doing so, you will help build a stronger, child-friendly South Australia and generate lasting opportunities for every child and our State's future.



Grace Portolesi
Minister for Education
and Child Development





Nurture

Why will a better start mean a better future for every child?

Parents and professionals who care for and work with children and families know that the nurture and care of a young child makes a real difference – in fact, the benefits last a lifetime. Research into brain development confirms that every aspect of a child's early life shapes the way a child learns and grows.

And most of a child's brain development takes place in the first few years of life. The neurological structures laid down in early childhood determine how children see themselves, build relationships and interact with others, acquire language, learn new skills and respond to challenges, risks and opportunities in life.

So how best do we support the development of every young South Australian?

We start by looking at the whole child, and by considering the child in the context of their family and community. Positive child development means focusing on their physical, social, emotional and intellectual growth, from conception right through to the age of 18. We don't put a child's mental and physical health, their playtime and learning into separate boxes. It's impossible to point to just one thing that holds the key to the early years.

The whole child

By starting with the whole child, and connecting all aspects of a child's life, we support each child's development.

Starting early and making connections between families, services and communities makes good sense for every child. Positive and nourishing early experiences help children to make the most of the potential that they are born with.

It also makes sense for our whole South Australian community, because damaging early experiences can mean that children might not realise this potential, or worse still, that a child's innate potential is profoundly compromised. For example, poverty, neglect and lack of intellectual stimulation – poor childhood development – in those early years may lead to poor mental health and wellbeing, unemployment, substance abuse and crime in later years. Indeed, multiple negative experiences in early life increase the likelihood of chronic health conditions such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, renal disease and depression in later life.

So, clearly children's wellbeing is highly dependent on the strengths and resilience present in their families and communities. We see it as vital that all professionals involved with children and families recognise these vulnerabilities and are readily able to connect families with support services.



...development is
affected not just by
genetics, but also
by nurture.

Dr Fraser Mustard

The benefits of investing early

Dr Fraser Mustard, a world-renowned early childhood expert and former Adelaide Thinker in Residence, estimated that the long-term cost of poor early childhood development and parenting is measured in billions of dollars.

Internationally recognised researcher Dr Clyde Hertzman has demonstrated that for every dollar spent in the early years society saves \$4 to \$8 in many other areas including health and crime prevention.

But investing in our children is not measured by dollars alone. It is clear that nurturing children and investing in the early years makes sense for South Australia's social and economic future. By doing so, we support the health, wellbeing, creativity and participation of every child in the life of our community.

How do we support the health and happiness of every child?

Parents want their children to enjoy a happy and fulfilling life. But parents also know that bringing up children in today's world is a challenge – and in many ways, one that previous generations have not faced.

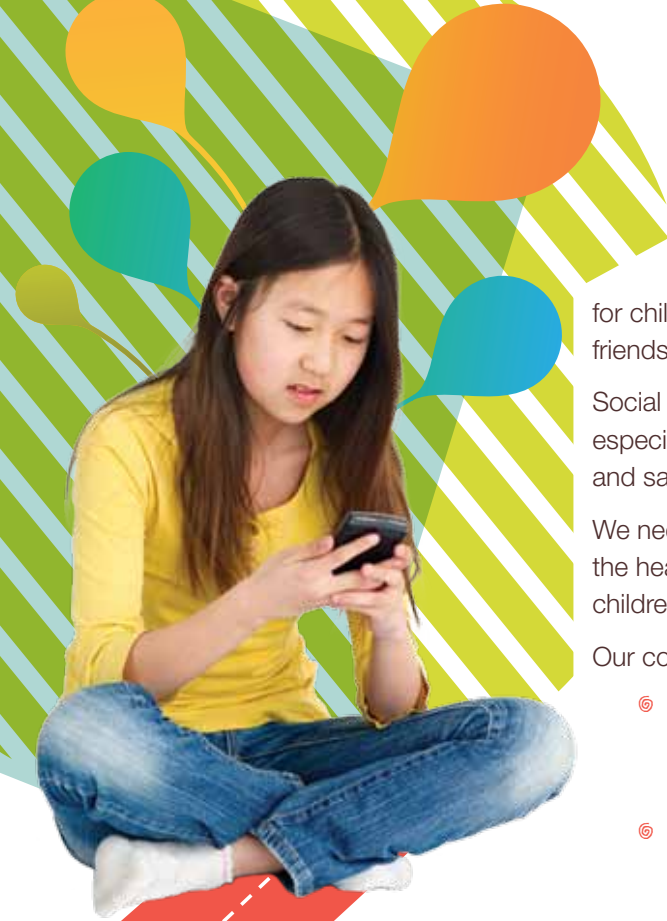
Family life across Australia is rapidly changing and often complex. Children are now growing up in diverse home, economic and social circumstances, including alternative care away from their parents. Many women are now having their first child later in life. The economic wellbeing of families, and our nation's productivity, requires parents to participate in the workforce, to have access to supportive employment practices, high quality education, childcare and other services for children and families.

It is well known that a family's social networks, income, and where and how children live, learn and play, help to shape a child's health and wellbeing.

Today's busy world also includes the influences of media and technology, and social pressures on children and parents. Families may face social concerns that include junk food and constant exposure to television and other media, as well as cyber safety and bullying. Advertising aimed at children contributes to pressure for parents to buy the latest technology, toy or fashion.

Social problems such as substance or alcohol abuse, domestic violence and unemployment can also profoundly impact on children's learning and development. Parental fears about safety can limit the opportunities





for children to play freely, socialise without adult supervision, or walk with friends to school.

Social and economic circumstances mean that some parents and children are especially vulnerable. These factors can put the health, education, wellbeing and safety of children at risk.

We need to look at how best our whole community can help families to support the health and wellbeing of all children, while especially lifting opportunities for children who are most vulnerable.

Our community challenges include:

- ⑥ Healthy weight. Thousands of our children are active and healthy, but nearly one in five preschoolers is overweight or obese: 16.5 per cent of boys and 21 per cent of girls.
- ⑥ Early development. Despite South Australia's leading position in early childhood development, the 2009 data from the Australian Early Development Index shows more than one in five children were developmentally vulnerable in one or more areas such as physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language, cognition, communication skills and general knowledge when they started school. These children come from all communities.
- ⑥ Achievement in literacy and numeracy at school. While around 90 per cent of our Year 5 students achieve at or above the national minimum standard we need every child to achieve their potential.
- ⑥ Employment and higher education. In 2010, 18.1 per cent of young people aged 15-19 years were not fully engaged in education or work. Not being engaged in education or training – learning or earning – can have a lifelong impact on the health and wellbeing of a young person.
- ⑥ Improving outcomes for children living in families with complex social issues. Responding more effectively to the growing number of children whose families face multiple and complex issues (such as poverty, domestic violence, mental health and substance abuse issues), which weaken family capacity to provide supportive environments for their children.
- ⑥ Reducing the gaps for disadvantaged population groups. Effectively improving life choices, experiences and opportunities for Aboriginal people and others including children under the Guardianship of the Minister, people with disabilities and those with English as a second language.

**... the future calls us
to measure and then
make policy around
wellbeing rather than
just around money**

Dr Martin Seligman

Thinking time

What stops you from being the best parent you can be?

How could that be changed?

How can parents be supported to help their children be healthy and happy?

What are the special challenges you face in your role as a parent?

What information would be helpful for you to receive as a parent?

Learn

How can we best support children to learn and develop?

Education is vital for a child's future, but we also know that children start learning long before they begin school.

We also need to pay attention to the social and emotional health of children if they are to develop as resilient, capable and creative young people. Happy, healthy children are more likely to want to learn, whether at home, preschool or school. Parents understand the link between health and their child's capacity to learn, and yet our systems and services have traditionally put health, wellbeing and learning into separate boxes.

The sheer diversity of families and the demands of modern family life means we need to take a new look at how we plan and connect all services for children and families.

We have a great city of Adelaide with many advantages, as well as a state with rural and city communities that are good places for raising children. Early childhood services, schools and child and family health services make a positive difference. Children themselves contribute their ideas and energy to the health and vibrancy of our community.

However, many of our services and systems were designed to meet the needs of previous generations. Systems, structures and teamwork across governments, agencies and communities can be fragmented.

At a time when there are unprecedented demands on 'family time', families spend already scarce time on navigating what can be a complicated patchwork of services for their children. This is even more of a problem for families with multiple needs, requiring access to multiple services.

Team around the child

We are making better connections to deliver services around the needs of families and children. For example, our children's centres mean parents access a 'one stop shop' of health, parenting and family services when they take their child to preschool or school.

Professionals such as our child and family health nurses consider a child's developmental progress while doing a physical health check. Health and education professionals are trialling multi-disciplinary approaches such as having a 'team around the child'. We're heading towards making schools a true 'community hub' for family support and education.



A child's ability to learn to read in the primary grades may depend no less on how [he] is taught than on the existence and nature of ties between the school and home.

Urie Brofenbrenner

We will be a more 'child-friendly' State if we explore how better we can:

- ⑥ connect services and professional help around children and families, not out-dated systems – this is at the nub of the 'no wrong door' approach we are adopting to better connect children and families with the help they need
- ⑥ create community hubs and 'one stop' locations in places that attract children and families, such as schools
- ⑥ consider and engage children when we plan and design public places, services and systems across local, state and federal agencies
- ⑥ tailor services to meet the needs of families and children who are most vulnerable, especially at critical times in life such as prenatal care, birth, the early years and as children progress through school
- ⑥ encourage everyone to accept a community responsibility for the health and happiness of every child
- ⑥ involve children and young people in contributing to family and community life
- ⑥ support non-government organisations (such as those providing sport, recreation and counselling services) to actively engage with children in the community and offer genuine 'child-friendly' experiences.

Kids ... have your say!

1. How old are you?
2. What is the name of the suburb or town where you live?
3. What makes you happy and why?
4. What do you like to do best in your free time?
5. What do you least like to do in your free time?
6. What kinds of things do you normally do in your free time?
7. If you had three wishes that could come true, what would they be?
8. If you had one extra wish that could only be used to help others, what would it be?
9. What can we do to make your neighbourhood better for children and young people?
10. What does the word 'healthy' mean to you?
11. What do you want to be when you grow up?
12. What's your favourite book?
13. If you were Premier of South Australia for a day, what would you do to make a difference for children?

Your answers can be sent into YourSAy, Policy and Communications, Department for Education and Child Development, GPO Box 1152, Adelaide SA 5001 or follow the links to YourSAy from www.everychild.sa.gov.au and read what others have to say!

Thinking time

What are some of the things you have to juggle in your life as a family?

How could that be changed or better supported?

Give us an example of improvements that can be made to a government or community service that would help you and your family.

As a member of the South Australian community, what would you like to see changed or improved for our children?

Achieve

What are our new directions?

The 21st Century requires South Australia and our young people to be:

- ⑥ innovative and creative
- ⑥ able to adapt to new challenges
- ⑥ developing higher-level skills both in academic and trade-related fields
- ⑥ contributing to community life
- ⑥ inclusive of a diversity of people
- ⑥ confident, resilient and living in healthy relationships.

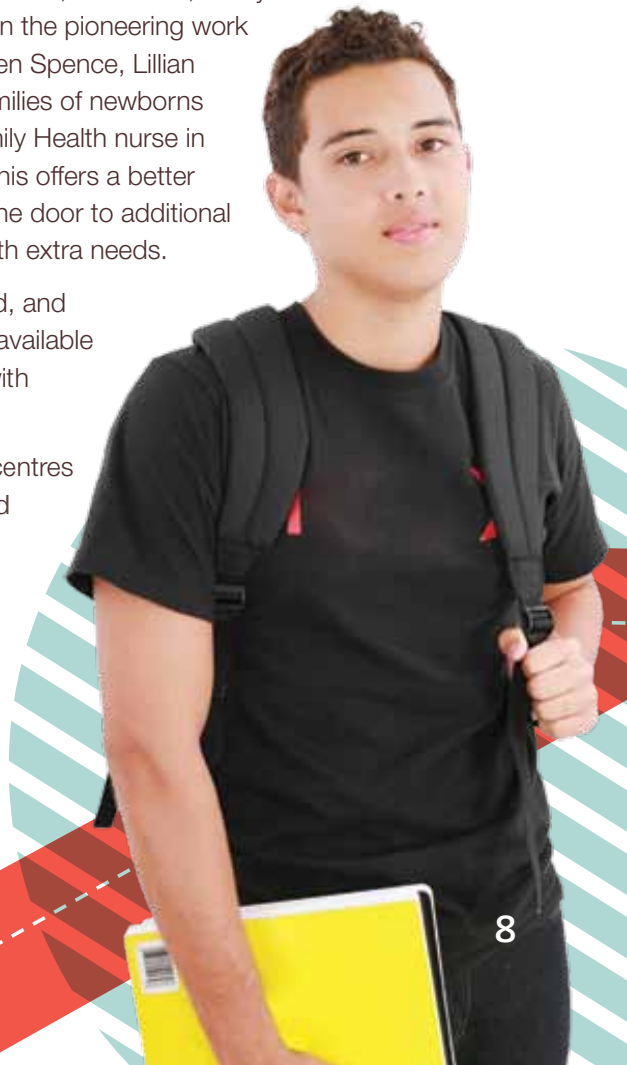
To achieve this goal, we must include and involve children and young people in building a strong, vibrant community that respects and values every child. We can build on past success because South Australia has a history of support for children, including those most at risk.

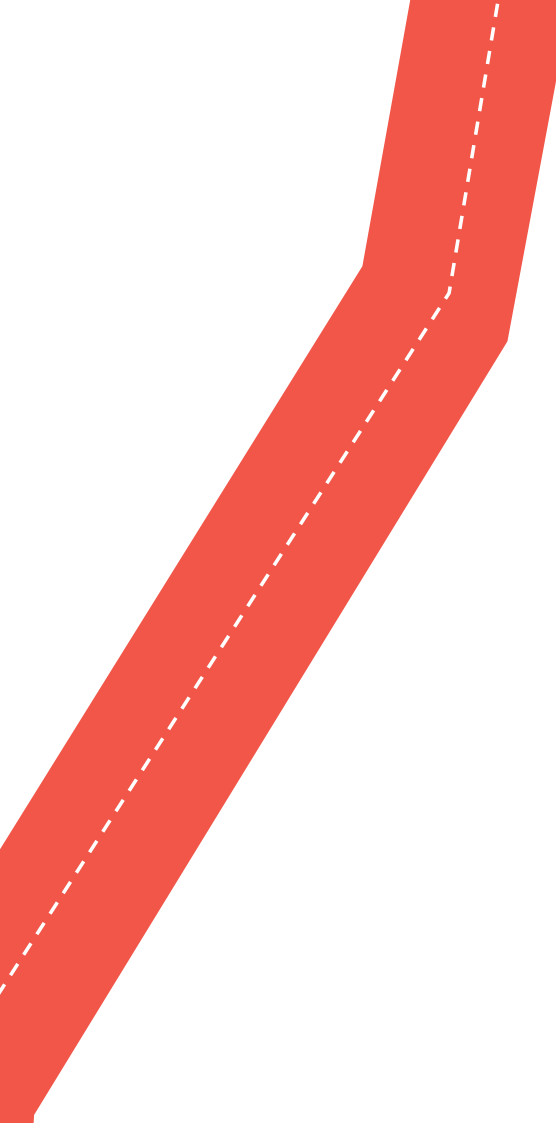
Traditionally, that support has come from family, friends, volunteers and community members. Our government-based early childhood services have evolved from our history of reform, innovation and support for families and children.

Today's professionals, researchers, and volunteers across a range of government and non-government health, education, family and childhood services have built on the pioneering work of reformers such as Catherine Helen Spence, Lillian de Lissa and Helen Mayo. Now, families of newborns receive a visit from a Child and Family Health nurse in the first six weeks of a child's life. This offers a better start for every child while opening the door to additional support for parents and children with extra needs.

Preschool is available for every child, and targeted preschool support is also available for Aboriginal children and others with special needs.

The growing network of children's centres brings together health and child and family services at local schools. Programs such as the Innovative Community Action Networks, or ICANs, bring together youth, community and education agencies to keep young people at risk of dropping out, engaged in education and training.





And the growing trend of vocational education and training in schools allows young people to find their passion, whether it involves going to university, learning a trade or other pathways to learn and work.

Our universities support professionals with research and practical support in areas such as child development, child protection and early childhood education.

International experts, including Adelaide Thinkers in Residence, Dr Martin Seligman and Professor Carla Rinaldi, work with schools and communities on innovative ways to support the health and wellbeing of young people.

The new Department for Education and Child Development is making stronger connections between health, child and family and education services.

South Australia invests nearly twice as much as the national average per child in our early childhood services.

Our challenge is to build on this history of leadership and to adapt to the new circumstances that children and families experience today in order to develop services and approaches that build a stronger future for the next generation.

Every chance for every child

Healthy child development and wellbeing is one of the State Government's seven priorities. To support this priority, new child development legislation will articulate and entrench the importance of children and families.

This 'enabling' law will enhance our community and government capacity to consider the needs of children and to work together to achieve better outcomes for all young South Australians up to the age of 18.

Development of the new legislation will include proposals that would:

- provide a new 'outcomes framework for children and young people' to support our shared priorities for the health and wellbeing of children, and to enable planning, coordination and reporting of outcomes that support children and services across State, local government and non-government sectors
- establish a Child Development Council with community, government and non-government representatives. This council would guide statewide planning that is in line with the shared priorities of the 'outcomes framework for children and young people'
- create regional 'trusts' for children and young people to bring together local community expertise and resources to deliver local strategies that support young people in regional communities
- enable governments, business, communities and individuals to invest and grow resources for children through a new Foundation for Children and Young People
- enhance the engagement and participation of children and young people in their communities as valued citizens in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.



Thinking time

Thousands of school children enjoy reading and develop literacy skills by taking part in the Premier's Reading Challenge.

Yet we know that reading to babies and infants can make all the difference to their early development, long before they start school.

Should we include a program where parents read to young children as part of the Premier's Reading Challenge?

What do you think?

Have your say

Your ideas and views will help shape the opportunities we all create for children and South Australia's social and economic future.

You might consider sharing your thoughts relating to the questions posed in the 'thinking time' areas.

We want to hear your views on this topic.

We invite contributions from children and young people, parents, professionals and support staff, volunteers and others in government agencies, non-government organisations, academics, local business and community members.

Your ideas will help shape what we do and how we put it in place.

A legislation discussion paper with more detail about the proposed legislation and opportunities to be involved will be available from www.edlawreform.sa.gov.au

To have your say, follow the links to the YourSay website from www.everychild.sa.gov.au or email edlawreform@sa.gov.au

or write to us at:

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